

February 15, 2017

Dear Appropriation Committee,

I am writing to urge you to preserve funding for Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, which is facing a cut in the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

Growing up at the foot of Blue Mountain in eastern Pennsylvania, I learned to value the beauty and importance of our country's natural landscape and resources. My childhood was spent hiking on trails, making lean-tos, memorizing bird species, and camping in state parks. As a child, I also saw the environmental devastation brought by zinc companies, which stripped all animal and plant life from one side of the mountain for decades.

As an adult who has lived in Connecticut since 2011, I now value our natural resources even more. I live a five minute drive away from Sleeping Giant State Park, and I have spent countless afternoons hiking its trails - and exploring trails in parks throughout the state - with my husband and dog in pursuit of exercise, education, and entertainment that requires little or no money. Sometimes in the parks, I find myself with a few moments of privacy within our densely-populated state, and at other times, I find community in other Connecticutans who are out enjoying nature with their own families, and who also believe in the importance of preserving our natural spaces within the state park system.

However, our parks system is not perfect. Our state parks are severely underfunded, with Connecticut ranking 49th out of all 50 states for lowest percentage of the overall state budget allocated to parks. Our camping facilities are not as modernized and welcoming as those in nearby states, with privies in campsites like Macedonia Brook State Park, and only one dog-friendly campground in the entire state after the closure of the Connecticut's second dog-friendly campground, Devil's Hopyard State Park, last July.

I strongly believe in the importance of maintaining our state parks for recreational, educational, and health purposes. Our state parks are open to enjoyment by all residents, and parks like People's State Forest, Gillette Castle, Wolf Den, and Day Pond preserve local history within the park borders. Time outdoors has been linked to lower rates of obesity, attention deficit disorder, and depression in children, and adults are well-aware of the peaceful effects of walking in nature. Without our state parks providing experiences of the natural world, we will be less healthy and less happy - and without their protection through DEEP, we may lose those valuable experiences and resources, the way my hometown lost part of their mountain.

An easy first step to preserve DEEP funding is to separate the parking fee revenues at our state parks, which currently goes into the general fund, into a fund earmarked solely for parks. It is estimated that this move alone would provide around \$6 million in revenue. I am also in support of a \$10 charge on all vehicle registrations in exchange for free parking at our state parks, which

would encourage more Connecticans to utilize our protected natural spaces and generate an estimated \$14.3 million in revenue.

Our state's parks are too important to us, and to our children, for us to further reduce their already shamefully low amount of funding.

Sincerely,

Lauren Gledhill
200 Evergreen Ave Apt 5E
Hamden, CT 06518